

MARTIN ŠRAJER / 23. 6. 2023

# Long Live the Republic

At the end of the war, Jan Procházka was a 16-year-old boy living in Ivančice in South Moravia. In April 1945, the town was liberated by Marshall Malinovsky. But in addition to celebrations, the town also saw pillaging, displays of cowardice and cruel retribution. Procházka utilised his ambivalent memories of this time first in stories *Vojenská čepice* (Military hat) and *Vojáci z našeho Dvora* (Soldiers from our Backyard). These later served as the basis of his book *Ať žije republika* and the script for the film of the same name by Karel Kachyňa. Procházka finished the 13-chapter-novella, which was from the start devised for subsequent film adaptation, in 1963. He later described his as the highlight of his bibliography. It was, however, not published until 1965, one month after the film's premiere. As was customary for duo Kachyňa-Procházka, they wrote the literary script together, but the technical script was written solely by the director. The original and the script was written as a first-person narrative from the perspective of 19-year-old Olin living in a village on the battlefield.

With the hero's age, the film followed a series of emotional coming of age films made by Kachyňa and Procházka in the first half of the 1960s: *Trials and Tribulations* (Trápení, 1961), *Vertigo* (Závrať, 1962) and *The High Wall* (Vysoká zeď, 1964). These were some of the first films in which they critically and non-dogmatically revised the recent past. After the occupation and the end of war (*Long Live the Republic* [Ať žije republika, 1965] and *A Carriage Going to Vienna* [Kočár do Vídně, 1966]<sup>[1]</sup>, they moved to post-war collectivisation (*The Nun's Night* [Noc nevěsty, 1967] and the period of Stalinist purges (*The Ear* [Ucho, 1970]). Although the hero of *Republic* is an adolescent boy, the film, striving to debunk the myth of liberation just like Škvorecký's novel *Cowards*, is clearly aimed at older audiences. Olin's naïve idealist perspective is in an ironic contrast with ruthless adults among whom there are no positive examples. There is no traditional celebration of victors and mockery of the

defeated. Each and every one has a vice. “We wanted to express the psychological maturation of a country boy who discovers the tragic aspects of life during dramatic and festive moments,” [2] clarified the authors in their explication. The literary script, preserving the main plot elements (the main story line in present tense is supplemented by the hero’s memories, fantasies and dreams), was submitted for approval on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1964. The assessments included partial objections to repeating motifs and a lengthy second half but were overall favourable. The film was supposed to be a representative title to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of liberation, and as a wide-screen two-part epic, it was expected to be a bit longer and have a bigger budget. Its development was discussed by two cooperating creative groups: Šmída-Fikar and Švábík-Procházka.

The film was made in collaboration with the Ministry of National Defence and Czechoslovak Army Film (CAF). Kachyňa made a good name for himself with CAF in the 1950s when he made several documentary and instructional films and two live-action feature films (one with Vojtěch Jasný). The army’s involvement in *Republic* was crucial. Thanks to it, the crew was able to extensively use military equipment, not only in front of the camera, but also during the shooting: some scenes were filmed from military helicopters. The army also freed three recruits from duty: cinematographer Jaromír Šofr, second cinematographer Jiří Macháně and production assistant Karel Vejřík. The demanding production with many action sequences and many extras took place between May 1964 and May 1965. More than 1800 scenes were filmed at eighty different locations, mostly in exteriors. Key part was played by the village of Únanov near Znojmo where the crew spent the most days. From 5.5 million crowns, the budget was increased to 8.35 million – almost three times higher than a regular budget for an average feature film in the first half of the 1960s.

Out of tens of thousands boys auditioning for the role, the director chose Zdeněk Lstibůrek [3] who was voiced by Jan Kraus in post-production. Some complications in the casting were caused by Soviet studio Mosfilm who sent Yuri Nazarov instead of the chosen actor Vladimir Ivashov. The production was also delayed because of the fatigue of some crew members, Christmas Holidays and unsuitable locations.

Due to the demanding production and post-production, the film wasn’t premiered on the anniversary of the Liberation in May or June 1965. The final copy was finished two

and a half months later. In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the delay was caused by a late release of soldiers and military equipment, difficulties in procuring costumes, sudden increase of the price of food, television antennas on locations and the necessity to manage children, animals and tanks all at once... "All scenes will be thoroughly "authentic" so I will not use external means to differentiate them. [...] It may take a while for the viewers to be able to distinguish between dreams and reality, but put together, a specific and composed sequence of images will create a whole the viewers can accept globally,"<sup>[4]</sup> hoped Kachyňa during the production.

In addition to the technical script and Kachyňa's direction, the film owes its elaborate composition to cinematographer Jaromír Šofr. It was his feature debut and the first wide-screen film he made with the aspect ratio of 2.55:1<sup>[5]</sup> He filmed the first part during his military service, the second as a civilian. He used the CinemaScope system, the best system Barrandov could offer to filmmakers at the time. The same thing applies for the rest of the equipment.

Olin's perspective is often emphasised by subjective scenes. His memories are stylised and their lyrical nature differentiates them from scenes depicting the raw atmosphere of the countryside. Some memories are also differentiated by the use of overexposure and striking light contrasts. Kachyňa used the same technique in *The High Wall*.

Individual levels are separated and connected by sound and parallel editing done by Miroslav Hájek. Thrilling moments are dynamized by quick cuts, on other occasions are moments from various narrative levels promptly assembled to dense associative clusters expressing the perception of the young hero. This makes the average length of a scene unusually short for the period the film was made in.

The film's post-production was also rushed because the film was a candidate for the Venice IFF traditionally held in Autumn. Contractually obligated Zdeněk Liška was already busy with another project and the producers couldn't wait for him. That's why he was replaced with Jan Novák who composed the music for seven of Kachyňa's film in the 1960s. After the events of August 1968, Novák emigrated and Kachyňa started collaborating with Liška.

The press promoted the film heavily long before its release. Reports from the production, interviews with authors and photographs with author explications were published regularly. In addition to posters and leaflets, detailed brochures were printed in high numbers and in several languages. Kachyňa and Procházka also often appeared in radio and television and cinemas screened trailers. A month after the premiere, Procházka's book was published. Its attractiveness was increased thanks to illustrations by Jiří Trnka (who was also responsible for the drawing of Zdeněk Ziegler's poster).

Public premiers were preceded by test and approval screenings for the management of Czechoslovak State Film, politicians from the Communist Party Central Committee and president Antonín Novotný himself. According to Kachyňa, Novotný liked the film and allegedly defended it to the Soviet Ambassador who thought it was anti-Soviet.<sup>[6]</sup> The Censorship Committee had no objections against *Long Live the Republic*.

The official premiere of the epic 132-minute-long film was held on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1965 during the celebrations of the Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship. It entered distribution in the maximum possible number of copies. The reviewers mostly described it as the best collective work by Kachyňa and Procházka, but they had some reservations. They often pointed out that the film's second half was rather slow-paced and long and recommended shortening the film.

In *Film a Doba*, Gustav Franci appreciated that the film strives for a "fuller and more complex reflection of the truth of revolutionary change happening in those years." He also praised the artistic development of the two authors.<sup>[7]</sup> To Jan Žalman, the film's poetic motifs resembled *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) by Andrei Tarkovsky. But he perceived Kachyňa's symbolic images as artificial ornaments.<sup>[8]</sup> Vladimír Bystrov wrote the film had excessive motifs and in relation to Procházka's script, he mentioned "gluttony of talent."<sup>[9]</sup>

According to A.J. Liehm, *Long Live the Republic* could bear comparison with foreign productions. But he was rather critical towards the film's unrestrained second part: "The work of the director, actors and cinematographer doesn't lose its quality, but what is lost rather quickly is our interest. The arsenal of used devices naturally gets narrower, same methods and techniques repeat constantly, disintegrating various

details, distracting, destroying a shore, everything that gives the film its shape, leaving only a wild stream giving off so many sparkles that you can't see neither darkness, nor shadow and a glimmer of light.”[10]

The film represented Czechoslovakia at various international festival. It didn't make it to Venice, but at the 7<sup>th</sup> Mar del Plata IFF in Argentina in 1966, it won a Grand Prix, the Argentinian Critics' Association Award and the CIDALC Award. The victory at Mar del Plata meant that *Long Live the Republic* was screened out of competition at other film festivals, for instance in San Sebastian, Spain, where it won the FIPRESCI award. In Czechoslovakia the film was awarded by the Film and Television Association. Miroslav Hájek and Jaromír Šofr won the Trilobit Award for editing, respectively cinematography.

Until June 1970, when the film was pulled from distribution, it was attended by 1 153 983 viewers. In the following months, other films by Kachyňa and Procházka, disappeared from cinemas, including *A Carriage Going to Vienna* which takes places not long after *Republic* and also dares to portray the behaviour of Czech people during liberation in a not very flattering manner.

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**Long Live the Republic** (Ať žije republika, Czechoslovakia, 1965), director: Karel Kachyňa, script: Jan Procházka, Karel Kachyňa, cinematography: Jaromír Šofr, music: Jan Novák, cast: Zdeněk Lstibůrek, Naděžda Gajerová, Vlado Müller, Gustáv Valach, Jurij Nazarov, Iva Janžurová, Jindra Rathová et al. Film Studios Barrandov, 132 min.

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Václav Šmidrkal, *Armáda a stříbrné plátno. Československý armádní film 1951–1999*. Prague: Naše vojsko 2009.

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#### **Notes:**

[1] Procházka addressed the Liberation of Czechoslovakia and the Prague Uprising in *Marathon* (Maratón, 1968) by Ivo Novák.

[2] Kachyňa – Procházka, *Ať žije republika. Film a doba* 11, 1965, no. 4, p. 218.

[3] František Sádek, *Ať žije republika. Šestý společný film Jana Procházky a Karla Kachyni. Kino* 19, 1963, no. 20 (8<sup>th</sup> October), p. 9.

[4] Ladislav Tunys, S Karlem Kachyňou nejen o jeho novém filmu. *Divadelní a filmové noviny* 8, 1965, no. 11 (6<sup>th</sup> January), p. 4.

[5] Kachyňa worked with the wide-screen format in three his previous films *Trials and Tribulations* (Trápení, 1961), *Vertigo* (Závrať, 1962) and *Hope* (Naději, 1963).

[6] A. J. Liehm, Karel Kachyňa je slavný... *Filmové a televizní noviny* 2, 1968, no. 19 (2<sup>nd</sup> October), p. 8.

[7] Gustav Franci, *Ať žije republika. Film a doba* 11, 1965, no. 12, p. 653.

[8] Jan Žalman, *Umlčený film*. Prague: Levné knihy 2008.

[9] Vladimír Bystrov, Procházka s Kachyňom v hemžení na náměstí. *Film a divadlo* 9, 1965, no. 23, pp. 8–9.

[10] A. J. Liehm, Ten dvanáctiletý Olin... *Literární noviny* 14, 1965, no. 46, p. 4.